

Dear State Senators and Representatives:

I would like to add my support to proposed legislation enabling the use of red light cameras. Red light violations are common and serious in New Haven and other towns within the region. On average, I witness people running red lights several times per day. Red light running is particularly common at peak travel times, which is precisely when it presents the most risk to other road users.

Although violations may seem trivial to those breaking the law, the consequences of red light violations are very serious. Crashes caused by red light running are far more likely to cause an injury than those caused by other types of violations. According to one study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, red light running was responsible for 200,000 crashes in 2005, resulting in over 150,000 injuries and over 800 deaths nationwide.

The economies of urban areas such as New Haven and Hartford rely on safe pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular travel. While suburban retail areas may depend more on longer trips along high speed roads and highways, most shopping trips in New Haven involve short trips to a nearby neighborhood district. The fear of drivers running red lights is very common in cities like New Haven, and it discourages people from making these kinds of trips on a daily basis, which severely affects retail sales. In addition, only a small plurality of New Haven residents rely on a private automobile to get to work, indicating that many trips to work are short in nature and involve means of transit (walking and cycling) that place workers at a potentially higher risk when confronted with drivers who are speeding or running red light signals. Based on my conversations with numerous individuals in neighborhoods across New Haven, the perceived lack of safe streets also encourages many people to drive more, rather than walk or bike, resulting in significant household expenses that might be better directed towards education, health care and other basic needs.

In other words, when it comes to people running red lights, the perception issue is at least as important as the safety issue. Although traffic safety problems cause numerous deaths and injuries, they also have very significant indirect impacts on public health, education, community involvement, household savings, and economic development.

The New Haven Safe Streets Coalition, whose petition was signed by over 2,000 city residents, over 30 elected officials, 12 out of 12 of New Haven's Community Management Teams and dozens of other local and state advocacy groups over the past nine months, has demonstrated that there is significant city-wide and regional interest in improved traffic safety. The petition called for a 90% reduction in traffic injuries and fatalities by 2015 - a goal that we must meet, given that these types of injuries are completely preventable. I believe that a 90% reduction in injuries would only be possible with greater enforcement, including red light cameras.

As I'm sure others will testify, red light cameras have been shown to be extremely effective at modifying driver behavior. Increased driver compliance rates have been found not just at camera-equipped sites, but at nonequipped intersections as well. In some cases, red light violations have dropped by 90 percent or more.

I hope that you will do everything possible to support the proposed legislation enabling the use of red light cameras on our roads. The vitality and safety of our state's towns and cities depends on it. Additionally, the use of such cameras could help free up law enforcement resources for other quality of life and safety issues, possibly providing significant relief to taxpayers.

Best regards,

Mark Abraham  
132 Mansfield Street  
Co-Founder, New Haven Safe Streets Coalition  
New Haven, CT  
203 500 7059